

Autism

What is Autism?

According to the Arizona Revised Statutes (ARS) § 15-761 (1), "'Autism' means a developmental disability that significantly affects verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction and that adversely affects educational performance. Characteristics include irregularities and impairments in communication, engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines and unusual responses to sensory experiences. Autism does not include children with characteristics of emotional disability..."

According to the implementing regulations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997, "A child who manifests the characteristics of "autism" after age 3 could be diagnosed as having autism..." [34 CFR 300.7 (c) (1)(ii)]

Autism is the term used to describe a variety of neurological characteristics that affect thought, perception, and attention. This disability can block, delay, or distort signals from the eyes, the ears, and other sensory organs. This usually weakens a person's ability to interact with other people, either through social activity or using communication skills such as speech.

How Common is Autism?

While estimates vary, experts say that 5 to 15 per 10,000 children have autism spectrum disorder. Autism affects three to four times as many males as females. The developmental problems may start during prenatal development, though symptoms may not be recognized for years. The cause of autism is still unknown.

In the 2001-02 school year, 1,476 Arizona students were classified as having autism and received special education services. This number represents 0.16 percent of the 922,280 children enrolled in Arizona public schools as of October 1, 2001.

What Effect Does Autism Have on a Child?

There may be no noticeable physical signs of autism. What *is* noticeable is the presence of uneven developmental abilities and scattered strengths and weaknesses. Intelligence tests are unreliable for people with autism since they are generally used to measure performance in people who have typical vision, hearing, and forms of experience. The tests may not measure extraordinary perception. Some skills in people with autism are normal, or even superior, for their age, and others show significant delay.

An important part of the evaluation process is consideration of Assistive Technology (AT) services. AT can include a wide range of services from low-technology devices to high-technology items such as communication boards or computers.

Research shows that individuals with autism can progress considerably with adapted teaching strategies. Daily instruction should be consistent and predictable. Verbal instruction, as well as printed materials, help the student with autism learn better. A well developed educational

program is one that provides learning experiences that can be used at school, at home and in the community.

Lifelong services and support systems must be available for persons with autism and their families. Exploring local, regional and national resources will help develop a network of information and services.

References

Division TEACCH. (1999). *Autism primer: twenty questions and answers*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina.

Hart, C. A. (1993). *A parent's guide to autism: Answers to the most common questions*. New York: Simon and Shuster.

National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities. (2000). *General information about autism and pervasive developmental disorder, fact sheet # 1*. Washington, DC: NICHCY.

Resources

Articles & Books

Bondy, A., & Frost, L., (Dec. 2001). *A Picture's Worth: PECS and other visual communication strategies in autism*. Bethesda, MD: Woodbine House.

Kozloff, M. (1998). *Reaching the autistic child: A parent training program*. Cambridge, MA: Brookline Books.

Kranowitz, C.S., forward by Silver, L. (1998). *The Out-of-sync child: Recognizing and coping with sensory integration dysfunction*. NY: Perigee.

Myles, B. & Simpson, R. L. (1998). *Educating children and youth with autism: Strategies for effective practice*. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

Nasseff, R., (2001). *Special children, challenged parents: The struggles and rewards of raising a child with a disability*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing.

Siege, B. (1998). *The world of the autistic child: Understanding and treating autistic spectrum disorders*. NY: Oxford University Press.

Thompson, Mary. (1996). *Andy and His Yellow Frisbee*. Bethesda, MD: Woodbine House.

Audio & Video Tapes

Videotapes and training materials catalog. Van Nuys, CA: Child Development Media, Inc., 5632 Van Nuys Blvd., #286, Van Nuys, CA 91401, (818) 994-0933, www.ChildDevelopmentMedia.com

Grandin, T. & King, L. J. *Autism insights; Autism perspectives; Making contact, sensory integration & autism.* (video tapes) Peoria, IL: Continuing Education Programs of America, http://www.autism.com/cont_ed_prog

Video and book lending library bibliography. Phoenix, AZ: Raising Special Kids, <http://www.raisingpecialkids.org/>

Organizations/Hotlines/Web Sites

Arc of Arizona, Inc., The, 5610 S. Central Ave., Phoenix, AZ 85040, 602-243-1787 or 800-252-9054, <http://www.arcofarizona.org/>

Arizona Department of Economic Security, Division of Developmental Disabilities, 1789 W. Jefferson, Phoenix, AZ 85007, 602-542-0419, <http://www.de.state.az.us/ddd>

Autism Society of America,
Greater Phoenix Chapter, P. O. Box 10543, Phoenix, AZ 85064-0543, 480-940-1093, <http://www.phxautism.org/>
Pima Co. Chapter, 1830 E. Broadway, #124, Tucson, AZ 85719-5964, 520-573-7325, <http://www.autism-society.org/>

Division TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children), 310 Medical School Wing E, University of North Carolina-CH, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-7180, 919-966-2174, <http://www.unc.edu/depts/teacch/mainpage.htm>

Enhancing Arizona's Parent Network (EAPN), <http://www.ade.az.gov/ess/eapn>

Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, 1717 W. Jefferson, #112, Phoenix, AZ 85007, 602-542-4049, www.de.state.az.us/gcdd

National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, 770-488-7150, <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/dd/ddautism.htm>

National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY), P.O. Box 1492, Washington, DC 20013, 800-695-0285, <http://www.nichcy.org/>

Parent Information Network, Arizona Department of Education, Exceptional Student Services, 1535 W. Jefferson, Phoenix, AZ 85007, 602-364-4015 or 800-352-4558, <http://www.ade.az.gov/ess/pinspals>

Pilot Parents of Southern Arizona, 2600 N. Wyatt, Tucson, AZ 85712, 520-324-3150, <http://www.pilotparents.org/>

Raising Special Kids, 2400 N. Central, Ste. 200, Phoenix, AZ 85004, 602-242-4366 or 800-237-3007, www.raisingpecialkids.org

Southwest Autism Research Center, 1002 E. McDowell Rd., Ste. A, Phoenix, AZ 85006,

602-340-8717, <http://www.autismcenter.org/>

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